

## CHAPTER TWO

### *And There Was Life in the Valley*

Winter in the mountains and valleys of Deseret was a test of faith and stamina for the pioneer Saints. Snows and bitter, blowing winds came early and lasted long. In the high valleys of the Wasatch the frosts were heavy in September and snows were on the ground in October. Spring sunshine rarely melted the earth's snow crust until late March or April, leaving only about five summer months to prepare for cold, ice and snow all over again.

Anxieties about the weather were sharply accentuated for some 11 pioneer families in Utah Valley during the winter of 1858-59, for they were making plans to move into new homes high in the Wasatch mountains when Spring came.

The road through Provo Canyon had been finished before the snows fell and a bridge spanned the Provo River. With the decision made to move into the valley, they spent the short days and long, crisp winter nights in building furniture and making clothes. Plows had to be sharpened and harrows made ready for the sagebrush and soil of the new country. Wagons had to be repaired and those who lacked teams had to acquire them.

William Meeks was appointed leader of the group and they met frequently under his direction to ask the Lord to bless them in their preparations. Their constant prayer was that the elements would be tempered so they could mature crops and sustain themselves and their families in the new country.

Spring came late in 1859 and it was the last day of April before the group of 11 men with their three wagons and teams of oxen could leave Provo.

Families of the men had agreed to remain behind in Provo until log cabins could be built and other preparations made for their coming. Tearfully, the wives and children stood by that April morning as they watched their husbands and fathers start out toward Provo Canyon and a new life.

Facing the uncertainties of the venture were Thomas Rasband, John Crook, Charles N. Carroll, John Carlile, John Jordan, Henry Chatwin, Jesse Bond, James Carlile, William Giles Jr., William Carpenter and George Carlile. *Wm Meeks*

Winter and the forces of nature had played havoc with the road in many places and traveling was slow. In addition, several snowslides blocked the route, making the journey hazardous as well as exhausting.

The only written record of the trip that has been preserved was in the journal of John Crook. He wrote:

"April 30, 1859, we camped at a snowslide in Provo Canyon that night. The next morning we pulled our wagons to pieces and carried them to the top of the snowslide which was about a quarter of a mile wide. Our May Day excursion consisted of traveling on up the canyon from the snowslide to William Wall's ranch where we camped. The next day we crossed Daniels' Creek on the ice. There were heavy drifts of snow behind the willow bushes. We thought we were the first settlers to arrive in the valley that Spring, but when we reached the present site of Heber we saw two teams plowing north of us which proved to be William Davidson plowing with two yoke of oxen and Robert Broadhead and James Davis with a similar outfit between them. We found that William Davidson had his family here, which I believe was the first family in the valley."

Exchanging greetings with the men whom they found already in the valley, the group went on to a spring about a mile north of the present site of Heber. They made their camp here, as John Crook notes in his journal, because this was considered the best land in the valley. As their camp was the largest in the valley and most of them originally had come from Great Britain, they called it London. The spring by which they camped still retains that name.

The first order of business was for each man to claim his section of land, either 20 or 40 acres, and begin as quickly as possible to prepare the ground for planting. Much of the earth was covered with sagebrush, which proved very thick and hard to clear. Yet with a prayer in their hearts and a song of faith on their lips they cleared away the brush and planted not only the seeds of new crops but also the seeds of new homes and a new valley for themselves and those they loved.

As the crops were being planted the men camped in tents or in the wagons, but they soon spent some of their time in laying out a townsite and building log houses. They decided to build closer together in a fort so they could protect themselves from Indians if that became necessary. They selected the northwest corner of the townsite for the fort string of huts.

About the middle of June, 1859, Jesse Fuller, deputy county surveyor of Utah County, commenced a survey of the London townsite. The initial point was established at the north end of what is now Main Street. The first line was run along the west side of Main Street, the blocks being made 24 rods square and the streets five rods wide. Each block was divided into four lots, 12 rods square. A tract of eight blocks south and five and one-half blocks west of the initial point was laid off into blocks and lots forming a rectangle about three-fourths of a mile long and one-half mile wide. This formed the west half of the townsite. The east half was similarly laid off some months later, leaving Main Street seven rods wide.



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